

Happy Endings: Disney Accelerationism

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Animation is a machine of effects comprised of frames, images and fragments as events or occurrences. As opposed to the cinematographer who must work with real space and action, the animator deals in artificial time, engineering movement/space and rhythm/time to create the action. The Walt Disney company has always been at the forefront of technological innovation in animation as one of the first to employ multiplane camera techniques and mastering sound-image fusion. The latter was perhaps the most important innovation to produce a sensory totality of our physical reality. It is the hyper-materiality of voice that diminishes the nonhuman aura of cartoons, allowing the marriage of the inhuman body to the human voice. However, being a caricature rather than the strict apparition of life, animation is not hyperreal so much as unreal. By their nature, cartoons refute the body's fleshiness—performing physical impossibilities and enacting the most sublime, artificial projection of the self. Real, physical bodies are subjugated by a fetishisation of unreal imagined bodies as we are by now well accustomed to, particularly in the wake of the increased subsumption of life and culture into cyberspace post COVID-19. While Disney had already consummated the marriage of inhuman body and human voice in their first two features (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Pinocchio*), their third, *Fantasia* (1940), saw voice largely absented, with characters retaining a wholly nonhuman corporeality, accompanied instead by the Philadelphia Orchestra and

fragmented into segments as opposed to one overarching linear narrative. Disembodied narration saw personas melt away to their essence and re-enter another assemblage—the “withdrawal” of things and bodies. In this way (and others), *Fantasia* and *Fantasia 2000* (1999) are prime examples of the Disney *raison d’être* that fuses technological innovation and imperial progress narratives with the Great Beyond of inhuman becoming.

The Fall of Man

Music critic Deems Taylor provides a live-action introduction to each of the eight segments of *Fantasia*. His voice becomes disembodied after the initial introduction along with conductor Leopold Stokowski. Both remain faceless for the duration of the film, silhouetted alongside the shadows of the orchestra against a red screen. Contrasted with chilly blues, the lighting recalls the mysterious, looming hues of giallo horror cinema. Or, more precisely, giallo recalls Disney, as Dario Argento’s *Suspria* (1977) was reportedly influenced by Disney’s use of Technicolour in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). The overlapping spotlights produce three shadows for each orchestra member who exist, from the outset, only as a duplicated shadow. Taylor and Stokowski, narrator and conductor, merge as one paternal agency, coming to conduct the sun itself towards the end of the first number *Toccata & Fugue in D-Minor*—a piece that had become a horror and villainy film cliché well before talkies.

Despite being introduced as “absolute music” aka “music that exists simply for its own sake,” the D-Minor dread and terror lingered. Writing in the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1940, influential journalist Dorothy Thompson decried the film as “A ‘Nazi’ Abuse.” She writes:

Mr. Disney ... beginning with Snow White, seems to have developed a gloomy, fatalistic, pantheistic philosophy to record the Fall of Man and to record it with sadistic relish. Nature is titanic; man a moving lichen on the stone of time... Anyhow, the course of nature and history are utterly beyond man’s will and control; and maybe by accepting the full onslaught of terror and collaborating with it, man, too, will be cleaned up in the process; ergo: *The terror is good, and it’s all the Wave of the Future*. Altogether Mr. Disney’s later films, and above all the films in the *Fantasia*, are a caricature of the

Decline of the West. They are cruel, and in the latest work brutal and brutalising.¹

While Thompson's review was dismissed as "crowding social significance into the merry antics of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck" and "sheer, unadulterated hysteria," her analysis of the Disney machine as romanticising and collaborating with the Fall of Man stands the test of time, particularly in the wake of *Fantasia 2000* (1999).² As all dystopias are often utopias of a rival ideology, Thompson's "brutal" dystopia is Disney's ecstatic utopia—one that is aligned with the ideological accelerationism of the right that sees the techno-capitalist process as an unsurpassable emergent order and dreams of new forms of collaboration with these inhuman forces.

Consider the *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. The well-known tale traces back to *Philopseudes* (*The Lover of Lies*) by Lucian of Samosata (120-180 AD) and remains such a prolific trope that such a thing as the "sorcerer's apprentice syndrome" has been named whereby humans lose control of their rebellious automations/creations (evinced the age-old mutual contamination of magic and technology). The apprentice in this case is Mickey Mouse, a sorcerer in waiting who had been redrawn with added pupils for the *Fantasia* occasion. Commanded by the malevolent paternal wizard, Yen Sid (Disney backwards), Mickey must perform his chores—transporting pails of water like a kung fu training sequence. Adopting the phallic hat and the container-of-knowledge magic book of the father, Mickey animates a broom that sprouts arms and hands to take up the task. Becoming lazy in the absence of labour, Mickey falls asleep and dreams of controlling the elements, commanding the stars and waves, until he wakes to water thrashing at his sides. The broom has not stopped its assigned task and the magician's den has become flooded. Attempting to halt the

automated broom, Mickey is confronted with its power, as it indifferently glides over his powerless body, obsessively dedicated to its task. Panicked, Mickey's shadow appears with an axe to destroy the broom by force, which he chops to pieces. The chop-pile of wood and

1. DOROTHY, THOMPSON, "MINORITY REPORT," IN *NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE*, 25, NOVEMBER 1940, MY EMPHASIS.

2. WOOD SOANES, "DR. SOANES DIAGNOSES MISS DOROTHY THOMPSON'S JITTERS" IN *OAKLAND TRIBUNE*, 1 DECEMBER, 1940, 29; HOWARD BARNES, "THE SCREEN." IN *NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE*, 1, DECEMBER 1940.

straw becomes menacingly re-animated and Mickey is confronted with an army of powerful, indifferent brooms, marching over him to fetch and empty pails of water. Before it's too late and Mickey is drowned, Yen Sid parts the sea like Moses (or a conductor) and rescues Mickey from the rising water levels and multiplying power of the brooms. He is spanked by Daddy before bashfully returning to his manual labour. As Mickey is widely considered an alter-ego of Walt, who initially voiced the character, Yen Sid might be seen as the ideal "future Walt" who is unreconciled with his present "apprentice" status in relation to technological innovation.

After a small intermediate slapstick skit that sees an orchestra member fumble with and accidentally dismember their tubular bells, the next segment is the anti-creationist *Rite of Spring*, which maps the evolution from cells and sea creatures to dinosaurs. Wandering the abandoned dustbowl of earth, dehydrated and starved, they too perish. The monstrous and foreboding dinosaurs are left un-anthropomorphised as the life drains out of their beady, featureless eyes thanks to a catastrophic shift in the earth's crust. For the intermediate skit between this segment and the following Dionysian *Pastoral Symphony*, Taylor introduces a new "strange personality": The Soundtrack. Represented as an abstract audio waveform, like an electrocardiogram heartbeat, this "strange personality" is livelier and more anthropomorphic than the dinosaurs preceding it. *Pastoral Symphony* then sees the amorous baby Bacchus drown in a sea of wine and tortured by (an equally indifferent) Zeus and Hephaestus languishing on Mount Olympus. Hephaestus is an apt addition considering that in Greek mythology, as god of fire and weapon making, he had assistants made out of gold who helped him with his work (some of the first known "robots").

The dancing elephants, alligators, ostriches and hippos of *The Dance of the Hours*, is curiously light-hearted for a composition that originally calculated the eternal struggle between good and evil—where Alvisé, the head of the Inquisition, reveals the dead body of his wife to his noble Venetian guests in an elegant ballroom with adjoining death-chamber. Having sentenced his wife to death by self-poisoning for her infidelity, her suicide would condemn her to hell for all eternity. Such tragic themes and the dreaded march of time are trivialised by the clumsy movement of Disney's unlikely ballet dancers, mocked. It is not until the next segment that the battle between good and evil is expounded on with

the positively apocalyptic *Night on Bald Mountain* and *Ave Maria*. This final segment is introduced as a marriage of “the profane and the sacred.” The looming bat-winged figure of Chernabog, God of the Night in Slavic mythology, pure evil, rises in *Night on Bald Mountain* to awaken the spirits of hanged criminals, fallen warriors and tortured souls. Like most other Disney villains, Chernabog has no motive for his actions, no tragic backstory, he is evil for “fun” like the original Joker before *Joker* (2019) banished the horror of the unexplained in favour of socio-political causality. Having wrought havoc on earth, he is interrupted by church bells, causing him to retreat into the earth re-joining the mountain peak he came from. As the elegiac melody of *Ave Maria* pipes up, a procession of monks is all that remains of life on earth, solemnly walking, silhouetted across the skyline, as though in ritualistic vigil with candles in hand—from death to burial. *Ave Maria* is famed to lighten the burden of mourners coming to terms with death and in much the same way this final segment does not represent earthly redemption so much as death and eventual transcendence to New Life. It aims to assuage the trauma of death with the promise of new beginnings. Passing through gothic arches, we see the Garden of Eden beyond—paradise. Thus man (and earth) is not so much “restored” or redeemed as it is destroyed (irretrievably “declined”) and reconstituted in another assemblage.

Sewing Up the Rights on Tomorrow

For Disney, past, present and future are entertainment commodities, exemplified by the Disneyland theme park sectioned into Adventureland, Fantasyland, Frontierland and Tomorrowland. Tomorrowland projects the colonial progress narrative established in Frontierland into the future as machinic and deterministic. It was described in a Disney publication as “Walt Disney’s realm designed by scientists and inventive men of industry where time marches only toward the future in the simplified understandable language of entertainment.”³ As Ariel Dorfman and Armand

Mattelart observe in their 1971 Marxist critique of Disney’s comics, it was Disney’s ambition to “render the past like the

3. CITED IN MARK LANGER, “WHY THE ATOM IS OUR FRIEND: DISNEY, GENERAL DYNAMICS AND THE USS NAUTILUS,” IN *ART HISTORY* 18, 1, 1995, 76-77.

present, and the present like the past and project both onto the future. Disney has patented – ‘sewn up all the rights on’ – tomorrow as well as today. For, in the jargon of the media, ‘he has made tomorrow come true today,’ and ‘enables one to actually experience the future.’”⁴ However, as many have noted, Tomorrowland has always been at risk of becoming “Yesterland,” requiring constant rebirths to remain “futuristic.” Curiously aligned with Nick Land’s penchant for Shanghai’s particular brand of retrofuturism, Shanghai Disneyland, which opened in 2016, flipped the physical placement of the lands and thus the temporal order of all previous Disneylands. As Ming Cheung and William McCarthy write, “in Shanghai, Tomorrowland became the Given, and Adventure Isle and Treasure Cove became the New... By placing tomorrow as the Given in SHDL, Disney assigns the future as already manifest in China.”⁵ Thus, for SHDL, tomorrow is already true today.

In the 1960s, Walt Disney expanded the Disneyland concept to develop a prototype for a new utopian city: EPCOT or the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. Conceived as an integral aspect of the plans for a new “Disney World,” Walt described EPCOT as “a community that will always be in a state of becoming. It will never cease to be a living blueprint of the future.”⁶ While it was never realised according to the initial plans, the concept prompted the state of Florida to create the Reedy Creek Improvement District (RCID), which allowed for Disney to exercise almost total governmental control over Walt Disney World (so named after Walt’s death in his honour). Although neo-reactionary Curtis Yarvin (better known by his blogonym Mencius Moldbug)

and co-founder of the Dark Enlightenment, reported that he was not aware of any previous propositions akin to Patchwork Theory (and despite making repeated reference to Disneyland in his writing), he seemed unaware of the model’s true predecessor, EPCOT. Replacing failed democratic governments, Patchwork proposes a web of sovereign and independent mini countries whose realm is a business or corporation.

4. ARIEL DORFMAN AND ARMAND MATTELART, *HOW TO READ DONALD DUCK: IMPERIALIST IDEOLOGY IN THE DISNEY COMIC* (NEW YORK: INTL GENERAL, 1984), 23.
5. MING CHEUNG AND WILLIAM MCCARTHY, “‘AUTHENTICALLY DISNEY, DISTINCTLY CHINESE AND FAINTLY AMERICAN: THE EMOTIONAL BRANDING OF DISNEYLAND IN SHANGHAI,” IN *SEMIOTICA* 226, 2019, 125-126.
6. *EPCOT. CALIFORNIA: WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS, 1966*, [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=SLCHG9MUBAG](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLCHG9MUBAG).

Moldbug writes: “Patchwork is something *new*. It will not feel like the past. It will feel like the future. The past—that is, the democratic past—will feel increasingly grey, weird, and scary.”⁷ Moldbug continues that “the streets will have no cars or very few, they will be safe, at night they will be bright and full of lively, happy people.”⁸ Even this vision is perfectly aligned with Disney’s EPCOT aspirations. As the plan video (or boardroom pitch) for EPCOT narrates: “No city of today will serve as the guide for the city of tomorrow... Here the pedestrian will be king. Free to walk and browse without fear of motorised vehicles.”⁹ Boasting the largest submarine fleet in the world, Disney World is a state within a state like the Vatican, bringing the “future” and “fun” of fantasy one step closer to a capitalist reality.¹⁰ As Disney Imagineer Tony Baxter puts it, “If the Magic Kingdom is fantasy made real, EPCOT is reality made fantastic.”¹¹ Likewise, Patchwork could be considered “reality made fantastic” as it is not too far removed from the current web of sovereign nation states that are corporations in a broader sense—particularly in the aftermath of the declarative theory of statehood defined by the Montevideo Convention, drafted less than a decade before *Fantasia* was released.

Jean Baudrillard said it best: “Disneyland is there to

conceal the fact that it is the ‘real’ country, all of ‘real’ America, which *is* Disneyland.”¹² For Baudrillard, Disneyland conceals the fact that America is no longer real, that it has become hyperreal, a simulacrum. As an “imaginary land,” Disneyland saves the illusion that America still exists in the order of the real. The flipside being that Disneyland should be experienced as just as “real” as America, exemplified by Doug Chiang’s statement about the opening of the Star Wars Galaxy’s Edge attraction at Disneyland, explaining that patrons are “basically going to live this place as if it’s real,

7. MENCIOUS MOLDBUG, “PATCHWORK: A POSITIVE VISION (PART 1)” *UNQUALIFIED RESERVATIONS* (BLOG), 13 NOVEMBER, 2008, LAST ACCESSED 22 JUNE, 2020, [HTTPS://UNQUALIFIEDRESERVATIONS.WORDPRESS.COM/2008/11/13/PATCHWORK-A-POSITIVE-VISION-PART-1/](https://unqualifiedreservations.wordpress.com/2008/11/13/patchwork-a-positive-vision-part-1/).
8. MOLDBUG, “PATCHWORK.”
9. *EPCOT*.
10. DORFMAN AND MATTELART. *HOW TO READ DONALD DUCK*, 23.
11. TONY BAXTER QUOTED IN MARK A. CATALENA, “THE MIDAS TOUCH,” *THE IMAGINEERING STORY*, SEASON 1, EPISODE 3, DIRECTED BY LESLIE IWEKS, AIRED 22/11/2019 (ABC, 2019), TELEVISION.
12. JEAN BAUDRILLARD, *SIMULATIONS*, TRANS. PAUL PATTON, PAUL FOSS AND PHIL BEITCHMAN (NEW YORK: SEMIOTEXT(E), 1983), 25.

because it is real.”¹³ A simulacrum of a simulacrum, Disneyland must then be read in terms of America’s (real) imperialist aspirations for techno-corporate command over a globalised utopian future. Reality made fantastic and fiction made reality. In fact, the EPCOT “flower” logo designed by Imagineer Norm Inouye in 1982, with five outer rings containing *Spaceship Earth* at its centre, is almost identical to the Venn diagram created by Robert Driscoll in the 1963 NASA paper that is widely thought to have coined the word cyborg: “Engineering Man For Space: The Cyborg Study.”¹⁴ The study was specifically aimed at adapting man to hostile alien environments in outer-space: “An effort to obtain the maximum integration of man into a man-machine complex,”¹⁵ which represented a major shift in prior thinking that had prioritised the inverse adaptation of space environments to accommodate human biology. The NASA diagram included four overlapping rings: biocybernetics, sensory deprivation, nutrition and life systems. The EPCOT symbol, however, has one extra ring, perhaps for the all-important element of “imagination.”

The Disney company has always had strong links with the government, major arms contractors and a variety of entertainment media, producing government propaganda during war time such as *Education for Death* (1943) and military training

videos such as *Fixed Gunnery and Fighter Tactics* (1943).¹⁶

Of particular interest is *Our Friend the Atom* (1957) made for Tommorrowland, which endorsed the development of atomic energy by way of the magic power to make ordinary materials into radioactive tools of science and medicine. The atom here is a genie in a bottle, unleashed by humanity. “Here lies our chance to make the atomic Genie our friend,” it gleefully proclaims. “Fiction often has a way of becoming fact,” it continues with hyperstitional aplomb.¹⁷ After Dario Argento, which of the

13. DOUG CHIANG QUOTED IN MARK A. CATALENA, “TO INFINITY AND BEYOND,” *THE IMAGINEERRING STORY*, SEASON 1, EPISODE 6, DIRECTED BY LESLIE IWEKS, AIRED 13/12/2019 (ABC, 2019), TELEVISION.

14. ROBERT DRISCOLL, “ENGINEERING MAN FOR SPACE: THE CYBORG STUDY,” *IN THE CYBORG HANDBOOK*, EDS. CHRIS HABLES GRAY, STEVEN MENTOR AND HEIDI FIGUEROA-SARRIERA (NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 1995), 81.

15. DRISCOLL, “ENGINEERING MAN FOR SPACE,” 81.

16. LANGER, “WHY THE ATOM IS OUR FRIEND,” 71.

17. *OUR FRIEND THE ATOM*. DIRECTED BY HAMILTON S. LUSKE. CALIFORNIA: WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS, 1957, [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=QRZL1WHC43I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRZL1WHC43I).

accelerationist prophets were peering over the shoulder of Walt Disney?

The contradiction between the magical illusion and the articulation of its production is a fundamental formal characteristic of early animation – recognising that to animate is to give life. From *Pinocchio* (1940) to the enchanted household items of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), Disney obsessively ruminated on these themes. Disney conjures an image of the world as machinery – not unlike William S. Burroughs’ kitchen gadgets that come for the housewife in *Naked Lunch* (1959). If *Fantasia* mapped the fall of man, *Fantasia 2000* picked up where its predecessor left off – sketching a vision of this Great Beyond of inhuman becoming and sliding from geological time into a transcendental time anomaly.

The Great Beyond

In 1941 Walt Disney said of *Fantasia* that it was Disney’s intention to make a new version every year, but the project stalled for 50 years before Walt Disney’s nephew Roy revived the project and became executive producer for *Fantasia 2000* in 1991. By the time *Fantasia 2000* was released in 1999 at Carnegie Hall in New York City, Walt Disney had been dead for 33 years – rumoured to be cryogenically frozen in a vault under Sleeping Beauty’s castle in Disneyland. After its premiere, *Fantasia 2000* was officially released on 1 January 2000 exclusively in IMAX theatres as the first theatrical feature-length film to be released on a 70-foot screen, combining 3D computer graphics and 2D animation.

Fantasia 2000 opens in the vastness of space as extraterrestrial/spectral flag-like rectangles, pixels or screens, containing vignettes of *Fantasia* (1940) advance toward and overtake us – at a pace that might seem threatening if their gravitational pull paid us any notice. Echoey excerpts from the original drift in and out of earshot as the pixels rush past us, pulled behind us, to join together like puzzle-pieces in the half-circle of an orchestral formation. The image fades to reveal the live-action orchestra, still outside of space and time in universal emptiness, as the narrator advises, as he did in 1940, “there are three kinds of music on this *Fantasia* program,” before introducing the third kind, Absolute Music, and Beethoven’s *Symphony no.5*. The pieces of Disney history floating unmoored from context through the cosmos, recall Nick Land’s

“Circuitries”: “There has been a terrorist incident in the film archives / the Western civilization show has been discontinued hundreds of gigabytes ... / take twenty billion years and universal history is on the screen / big bang is to be redesigned.”¹⁸

Beethoven’s *Symphony no. 5*, that most ubiquitous of stormy C-Minor numbers, is the opening composition. The German Romantic author of fantasy and Gothic horror E. T. A Hoffmann wrote of Beethoven’s instrumental music in 1810, that it “opens to us the realm of the monstrous and immeasurable.” He continues:

Glowing rays shoot through the deep night of this realm, and we sense giant shadows surging to and fro, closing in on us until they destroy us, but not the pain of unending longing in which every desire that has risen quickly in joyful tones sinks and expires. Only with this pain of love, hope, joy – which consumes but does not destroy, which would burst asunder our breasts with a mightily impassioned chord – we live on, enchanted seers of the ghostly world!¹⁹

Too aligned with this description to be a coincidence, *Fantasia 2000* accompanies *Symphony no. 5* with light streaming down through the clouds with the density and pace of water rushing down a cliff face. Lightning cracks as the stream hits ground zero in a heap of bubbles on a colourful geometric cluster, contrasted with a grey world. As a flock, they fly off like butterfly wings without bodies, bringing colour to the world, before the black ground cracks open to reveal its molten underbelly. Black and red bat wings without bodies emerge in swarms from the earth before converging to eclipse the sun as a singularity (like a de-anthropomorphised and multiplicitous Chernabog), violently driving off their colourful, outnumbered counterparts. To close, a burst of

light from the heavens shatters the compound, allowing the coloured shapes to ascend to the heavens, while their darker counterparts descend.

Like many of

Fantasia’s segments, the following piece, *Pines of Rome*, does not feature any human characters. The 3D rendered whales with 2D eyes roaming the starlit

18. NICK LAND, “CIRCUITRIES,” IN #ACCELERATE: THE ACCELERATIONIST READER, EDS. ROBIN MACKAY AND ARMEN AVANESSIAN (FALMOUTH: URBANOMIC, 2014), 254.

19. E. T. A. HOFFMAN, 1908. “BEETHOVEN’S INSTRUMENTAL-MUSIK,” IN E. T. A. HOFFMANN’S SÄMTLICHE WERKE, EDS. C. G. VON MAASSEN, TRANS. BRYAN R. SIMMS (MUNICH: GEORG MÜLLER VERLAG, 1908).

arctic are no longer earthbound, lifted out of their natural ocean habitat by a non-anthropomorphic star-god, breaking through the earth's stratosphere to frolic unanchored in outer-space. Although the baby whale is at first frightened by the atmospheric change, experiencing thunder and lightning outside of the ocean, it eventually comes to delight in this new phase of unrestrained existence. In this way, the opening numbers of *Fantasia 2000* suggest that the romance or libidinal delight of subsumption and ascension (an "unending longing" for annihilation), has overcome the horror. The pantheistic and machinic inhuman forces looming over us produce not dread, but the thrill of being taken, subjected, consumed. Like a Disney Inc. rollercoaster or haunted house, they exploit our fear of death or the unknown and make us like it—turning that fear and loss of control into exhilarating fun.

Rhapsody in Blue is the only segment that features wholly "human" characters and is set in the Great Depression. Although seemingly incongruent with the futurism of the rest of the film, from another perspective this could be a matter of using the past to set up the coordinates in anticipation of the future, or the next great depression. As with the temporal structure of Christ's second coming in Christian eschatology, here figures of repetition serve as a model for "the end." As a plan or sketch for the (retro)future, the animation of this segment sits at a significant remove from the rest of the film, decidedly freehand and two dimensional. Although on the surface it might be a simple tale of upward mobility (the homeless character fulfils his dream of "clocking in" when the construction worker quits to become a jazz percussionist), its most apparent "allegory" is of man's relationship to machine. The construction worker is shown to be his jackhammer's appendage as it races off ahead of him on a course of its own as the worker drearily coasts along for the ride, lethargic and unphased. Like Mickey's self-organising broomsticks, the worker in a fully automated post-work society becomes bored and complacent. A giant pneumatic hammer independently hammers away, stopped only by the worker who stalls it momentarily by jamming his jackhammer in its path to unsheathe his peanuts (perhaps a currency akin to non-unionised Disney staff wages). The subway commuters are equally an appendage of the capitalist machine. They commute back and forth as a non-individuated group. The arms they have held erect on the train to steady themselves remain mechanically upright even after disembarking—recalling Alenka

Zupančič's analysis of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), where "comic characters are not subjects as opposed to the structure, they are subjectivized points of the structure itself."²⁰ Rather than the story of the Tramp "becoming machine," *Modern Times* is the story of a machine developing "subjective tics": "Just as Charlie becomes a helpless toy in the 'hands' of the feeding machine, the more the machine becomes Charlie."²¹

Piano Concerto No. 2 is accompanied by (a now familiar) Toy Story that prompts us to consider the vitality of the objects and environs that we live within. The toys are not exclusively objects, commodities or persons, but a combination with the potential to "take flight" from their man-made confines. In *Pinocchio* (1940) tradition, the key metaphysical question is what it means to be "real." To offset the lofty philosophical pretension to seriousness of *Piano Concerto No. 2*, the following segment, *The Carnival of Animals*, interjects with a gesture of derision. It resembles *Dance of the Hours* (a slapstick ballet) except the ostriches are reconceived as flamingos. This time, however, the mockery of "grand themes" is more forthright. James Earl Jones introduces the segment:

Here, the sensitive strains of impressionistic music combine with the subtle artistry of the animator, to finally answer that age-old question, "What is man's relationship to nature?"
[He is handed a note] Oh, sorry. That age-old question, "What would happen if you gave a yo-yo to a flock of flamingos?"
[Turns to look off-camera] Who wrote this?

Here, anthropocentrism and the philosophical tradition is trivialised—nothing more than a comical set of illusory, absurd "what ifs." Like the sorcerer's phallic hat and book, in the wrong hands, technological/magical knowledge is nothing but a yoyo in the talons of clumsy flamingos.

Magicians Penn & Teller introduce the remastered *Sorcerer's Apprentice* as an intermediary skit rather than a stand-alone segment. This is the only element of the original *Fantasia* to make it into the next iteration and what makes its reappearance significant is its introduction: "We're here to tell you that all stage magic is a fraud, a hoax, a sham," says Penn, "Sleight of hand... Lies! Transformations... Fraud! Dismemberment... Rip-off! Fakes! All are illusions. What we're here to talk about is

20. ALENKA ZUPANČIČ, *THE ODD ONE IN: ON COMEDY* (LONDON: MIT PRESS, 2008), 196.

21. ZUPANČIČ, *ODD ONE IN*, 196.

real magic. We're gonna bring on a guy now who's the real deal, the genuine article. In fact, he taught us everything we know." The cartoon magician, the paternal inhuman ruler, is more real, more powerful, more magic, than the human fraudsters. In fact, the Yen Sid machine is our future, our messiah, master of the atomic genie.

In *Fantasia*, Mickey "crosses over" into the realm of live action, tugging at Stokowski's coat tails like a child. "Mr. Stokowski. Mr. Stokowski," he pleads as if to ask something but only to say, "My congratulations, sir." Stokowski returns in kind, "Congratulations to you, Mickey" before Mickey replies: "Gee, thanks. Well, so long! I'll be seeing you." *Fantasia 2000* retains this sequence with Stokowski's silhouetted figure remaining in the backdrop as Mickey crosses the set (already decidedly outside of space and time) to address our new maestro: "Mr. Levine!" he chuckles, "Okay, Mr. Levine. Everyone's in place for the next number." As Walt's other alter-ego, Mickey's silhouetted figure emerges from the dark to become 3D and we see Walt reincarnated. Though not yet in his ideal Yen Sid form, Mickey has both mastered time travel and revived/modernised his body to suit a future utopia that refurbishes the nostalgia of the past. As Dorfman and Mattelart note, "to interpret technology as a return to the values of the past is the solution which imperialism must offer in the next stage of its strategy."²² A decidedly neo-reactionary approach that permeates the Disney Empire oeuvre.

Mr. Levine introduces the next segment with the line: "When we hear Sir Edward Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance*, we think of a graduation ceremony... Actually, Sir Edward Elgar composed it for many kinds of solemn events." *Pomp and Circumstance* is a Disney retelling of Noah's Ark with the addition of Donald and Daisy Duck. Here the "graduation ceremony" (or salvation-ascension) of Noah's Ark includes our automated friends. Indeed, Donald orchestrates the whole thing, rendering Noah a minor character and god-like overseer.

The floating image of Angela Lansbury introduces the final segment, *Firebird*, as a story of "life, death and renewal." A Greek dryad brings summer to a winter wasteland, sprinkling greenery like pixie dust, before a volcanic evil emerges like Chernabog in *Night on Bald Mountain*, threatening to destroy the life she brought to the earth. He consumes her in his fiery jaws, leaving the earth once again barren. Thought dead, she rises weakly from the ashes, broken by destruction, only her tears

22. DORFMAN AND MATTELART, *HOW TO READ DONALD DUCK*, 189.

promising to bring life back to the ashy grey badlands. Recuperating her power, she showers the earth with her tears, rejuvenating it, accompanied by butterflies (with bodies). The life, death and renewal of this segment does not refer to humanity, but to the earth. Human characters are once again absent, always and already *dead to the world*.

The Greek-god nostalgia in *Fantasia* and *Fantasia 2000* is at once representative of the lost paradise, which it could not enjoy, and of human transcendence to that other nature, technology. However, where Dorfman and Mattelart argue that Disney shows technology to be “the maid dressed up to look like a fashion model,” I would argue that the *Fantasia* films show technology to be the king in disguise as a maid and warns, as with *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, of this grave mistake.²³ This is a classic distinction often made in science fiction and fantasy between *Magia* and *Goeteia*. Where *Magia* makes use of the inherent power of enchanted nature, *Goeteia* involves conjuring and controlling those spirits—the latter sorcery being more readily associated with modern industrial technology used as a means toward power. The genie, too, is an example of *Goeteia* as they are controlled by whoever possesses their lamp-prison—the powerful slave has a master. Yen Sid, as the ideal manifestation of Walt Disney as “ruler of the machines,” reveals an underlying desire (which remains unfulfilled) for future mastery. Such an ambition recalls the audio-animatronic Abraham Lincoln attraction on Disneyland’s Main Street: “If destruction be our lot, we ourselves must be its author and finisher. As a nation of free men, we must live through all times, or die by suicide.” A speech that was later revised for the Hall of Presidents attraction, adding “surely, God would not have created such a being as man, with an ability to grasp the infinite to exist only for a day. No, no, Man was made for immortality.”²⁴

23. DORFMAN AND MATTELART, *HOW TO READ DONALD DUCK*, 266

24. THE SPEECH THAT APPEARS IN GREAT MOMENTS WITH MR. LINCOLN AND THE HALL OF PRESIDENTS HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS, COMPILING AND COLLAGING DIFFERENT LINCOLN SPEECHES FROM 1860-1864.

Deus Ex Machina / Happy Endings

If this collection of stories amounted to a Promethean tragedy (or horror), the catharsis would be a result of our victimage. “Through pity and fear,” we would find our redemption.²⁵ The plot would race toward some final, sacrificial, catastrophic conclusion. But *Fantasia* doesn’t deal in tragedy, its episodic, open-ended sense of time is much more the stuff of comedy in Zupančič’s terms, where “comedy is not the story of the alienation of the subject, it is the story of the alienation of the substance, which has become the subject.”²⁶ In this way, we might see the *Fantasia* series to be a Comedian’s comedy. However, while they aren’t particularly tragic, few would describe these films as *funny*.

The musical selections are predominantly Romantic compositions, which are delivered in excessively fast tempos, rearranged with overly dramatic renderings. Like the Futurists, the march of technology and its overcoming of humanity itself is thrilling, sublime. In keeping with the Disney corpus, we could classify the *Fantasia* films as *romance*. The idealised, perfected happily-ever-after where everything has a way of working out in the end. Here, it is unadulterated love for the divine coming super-intelligence, where the happy ending is *the end* itself. They revel in the end of history like any good apocalyptic drama—a titanic struggle between good and evil where the violent and the grotesque is offset by a vision for a world transformed. Love for Christ, the promise of ascension and the Christian family values often associated with Disney are intertwined with a new god, re-invested in a magic intelligence beyond human comprehension. It is not that this new god necessarily replaces the Christian God as a site of worship but that both are understood to “go on” independently of humanity and are thus worthy of our devotion and collusion with its higher purposes. As Dorothy Thompson contended, Disney’s vision is pantheistic—which is perhaps a logical implication of animation. The vitality of objects, commodities, animals, technology and persons is animated by the same spirit, made from the same material.

The divine and the universe are identical and, in Spinozist tradition, God embodies this unity of all substance. In this way, Disney’s pantheism suits

25. ARISTOTLE, *POETICS*, TRANS. MALCOLM HEATH (LONDON: PENGUIN BOOKS, 1996), 10.

26. ZUPANČIČ, *ODD ONE IN*, 28.

the increasingly “leaky distinctions” (to use Donna Haraway’s term) between human and animal, organism and machine, material and immaterial, simulacrum and the Real.

However, given that Disney has often been criticised for spouting reactionary parables of the American Right including (but not limited to) racism, sexism, cultural and economic imperialism, anti-union repression and FBI collaboration, the parable of *Fantasia* must also be placed within the Disney Empire oeuvre: As neo-reactionary propaganda. So, what does Empire want? Disney believed in magic. That is to say, Disney believed in technology and its all-powerful, unstoppable (why-would-you-want-to) power. Empire wants to praise their “expanded” god. Like the myth of Walt’s cryogenically frozen corpse, the Disney Empire aspires to be reanimated, to enter another assemblage. If, as Baudrillard indicated, Disneyland is not mere phantasm, but is the real of that country touted to be the Leaders of the Free World, *Fantasia* might be considered a positively religious guide for America’s “crossing over.” So, rather than tragedy, comedy or some failed attempt at fusing “high” and “low” culture, we might rethink of *Fantasia* and *Fantasia 2000* as romantic propaganda—a joyous techno-capitalist accelerationist manifesto that paved the way for the likes of Mencius Moldbug. There is no real end, because the end is just another reanimation. Accept the full onslaught of terror. The terror is good. Clean man up. *It’s all the Wave of the Future.* ■